

CSIR-IICT Webinar Educates Students on Drug Discovery, Safety Gear for COVID-19

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New Delhi, 15 June: Students had an engaging session on the current scenario on drug discovery and safety protocols for containing COVID-19 through a webinar organized by the CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), Hyderabad. Addressing the students, Dr. S. Chandrasekhar, Director, CSIR-IICT, said the scientists stood strong in the period of lockdown to find solutions for combating the new virus that affected the world. The IICT scientists too worked continuously to ensure a speedy solution in the form of drugs and protection gear to reach the society at affordable prices.

Scientists from the institute discussed drug discovery, repurposing of drugs, sanitisers, masks, face shields and other equipment to combat COVID-19 during this webinar. Dr. S. Chandrasekhar said the masks and face shields developed at the Institute are game changers for the common person. Elaborating on drug discovery, Dr. Chandrasekhar said the time taken for any drug to come to the market is about 8 to 12 years, and can cost approximately Rs 10,000 crore. This process involves many steps right from identifying a molecule to trials and permissions. Utmost importance while developing a drug is given to safety and toxicity of the drug. He advised students to maintain social distance and follow self-hygiene to defeat the spread of the virus.

Dr. Prathama S. Mainker, Senior Principal Scientist, discussed the journey of drug discovery, while Dr. Ch. Raji Reddy, Senior Principal Scientist, spoke on repurposing of drugs. He said as drug discovery takes many years, scientists are repurposing drugs that have been used to contain various flu or diseases across the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) identified 25 such drugs to be repurposed and tested against COVID-19. Among them, the CSIR identified five compounds and began working on them. The Institute's work on Favipiravir, Remdesivir, and Umifenovir included development of a process technology so as to make them available at affordable costs in the market, once they are cleared by the regulatory authority.

Dr. Anthony Addlagatta, Senior Principal Scientist, detailed the working of RT-PCR testing kits for COVID-19. Dr. S. Sridhar, Senior Principal Scientist, demonstrated the use of masks and face shields developed at a low cost at the Institute and the usefulness of them. Dr. Ramanuj Narayan, Senior Principal Scientist, moderated the webinar and explained the importance of maintaining a good hygiene and following the preventive measures issued to contain the spread of the virus.